

ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives are different ways of meeting the stated purpose of the goals of the project. For the purposes of this study, the goal is to provide recommendations for the long-term preservation of the significant resources in the Loess Hills of western Iowa. To this end, five alternatives are evaluated.

The alternatives are described fully in Part I and are briefly discussed below:

Alternative 1 – Management by Local Government Units (No Federal Action Alternative)

The no-action alternative is an attempt to describe what would happen if present management practices and trends were projected into the future. Under this alternative, local government units (LGUs) such as cities, towns, and county governments, would continue to be responsible for resource protection. Each unit would continue to be responsible for the development and implementation of comprehensive planning and zoning ordinances that may aid in resource preservation. Comprehensive Plans can provide a long-term management strategy for resource protection and sustainable growth by specifying actions, controls, and strategies to maintain important resources.

As of this writing, Plymouth County has completed a Comprehensive Plan, and Woodbury and Mills counties are developing such plans. The Metropolitan areas of Sioux City and Council Bluffs are also developing Comprehensive Plans. Under this alternative, these comprehensive planning efforts would continue. Counties would continue to work together through the efforts of the Loess Hills Alliance on common concerns throughout the landform. Individual LGUs could work cooperatively with other LGUs in the Loess Hills, or could operate on an independent basis. Each LGU would be responsible for ensuring that existing state regulations, statutes, and programs that contribute to the protection of the Loess Hills are effectively applied. The Loess Hills Alliance would continue to support and enhance individual LGU efforts by implementing education, stewardship, and outreach programs, providing matching grants, and coordinating land protection opportunities for interested LGUs. The State of Iowa or the Loess Hills Alliance could provide additional incentives to the LGUs to develop ordinances that are sensitive to the Loess Hills.

The Loess Hills Alliance, The Nature Conservancy, the Western Hills Area Education Agency, County Conservation Boards, and other groups would continue to provide educational programs and seminars that contribute to the preservation of the Loess Hills. Property owners would continue to have the option to make use of these and other programs. Conservation easements, land donations, bequests, and other land protection opportunities would continue to be made available by land trust organizations that are operating in the area.

Alternative 2 - Management by a Joint Powers Board

This alternative involves the establishment of a Joint Powers Board (JPB) to provide protection to the resources, per Chapter 28E of Iowa law, which permits state and local governments to provide joint services and facilities and to cooperate in other ways of mutual advantage. The JPB in the Loess Hills could be given the responsibility to prepare a Comprehensive Plan (CP) subject to public review, for the entire landform region. The CP would specify the actions, responsibilities, controls, and strategies to maintain important resources and economic uses of the land. Individual counties would be responsible for implementing the CP.

The Loess Hills JPB would consist of representatives from each of the seven counties located within the Loess Hills landform region, or it could be the Loess Hills Alliance.

The JPB could utilize the broad range of public and private partnership opportunities available in the Loess Hills and help to further promote land uses that sustain the natural and cultural resources of the Loess Hills. Possibilities include forming partnerships with landowners and various agencies and organizations already working in the Loess Hills. These entities could be brought together in a coalition with the JPB for land use planning. A funding account could be established and managed by the JPB, which would be earmarked for land use planning and selected demonstration projects meeting JPB established criteria (restoration, mitigation, preservation).

An advisory or ad-hoc committee could be established to support the JPB. The advisory committee would make recommendations to the JPB and provide advice on land use management and provide a forum for public involvement. Members of the advisory committee could include the Loess Hills Alliance, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, landowners, developers, technical experts from universities and colleges, representatives from the Hungry Canyon Alliance, Loess Hills Preservation Society, interested tribes (Otoe-Missouria, Ioways, Winnebago) and others as identified. Coordination with existing state regulations and county ordinances would be provided by the JPB. The NPS, upon invitation of the JPB, could serve as a non-voting member on the advisory committee until planning efforts are completed.

Alternative 3 - National Reserve

This option is contingent on Congress passing legislation that would designate the entire Loess Hills landform region (approximately 640,000-acres) as a National Reserve, an affiliated area of the National Park System. Affiliated areas must meet the same significance criteria as units of the NPS, but are neither federally owned nor directly managed by the NPS. Rather, a management entity is designated to provide management and oversight for the area. The management entity must manage the affiliated area in a manner that conforms to all policies, laws, and regulations that are applicable to units of the NPS. Affiliated areas have access to technical, financial, and program assistance from the NPS. Usually, the assistance provided is of a technical nature, such as for preparation of a management plan or interpretive exhibits, and is secured on a competitive basis.

The Loess Hills Reserve would be managed by a special entity identified in the legislation that establishes the Reserve. The management entity, with NPS assistance, would prepare a Comprehensive Plan that meets NPS standards and that furthers the purposes of the Loess Hills National Reserve. The Comprehensive Plan would be a planning document that identifies how resources, visitors, and facilities will be managed for the next 15-20 years. Working with local government units and interested tribes (Ioways, Otoe-Missouria, Winnebago, and others), the management entity could craft model ordinances, and help coordinate local and regional activities with state regulations and programs. Incentive programs, grants, and conservation easements could be incorporated into this option to encourage county and city land use planning efforts towards a more sustainable direction. Development could be discouraged in sensitive areas while growth could be directed and encouraged in other areas. The responsibilities and authorities of the management entity would include comprehensive long-range planning; coordination of stewardship programs and activities; establishment of cooperative agreements; and dissemination of standards for visitor services and resource protection.

Alternative 4 - Special Landscape Areas

This alternative includes a management combination of National Reserve and Local Government Units. Under this alternative, 12 Special Landscape Areas (Figure 6) would be designated as a National Reserve, an affiliated area of the National Park System. Local government units, as in Alternative 1, would continue to manage the remainder of the landform region in a manner consistent with the local ordinances and comprehensive plans, as applicable. This alternative would be contingent on the 12 Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) meeting the criteria for eligibility and on Congress passing legislation to designate the SLAs as a National Reserve.

Collectively, the 12 SLAs encompass approximately 100,000 acres (about 15 percent of the study area) and are distributed among the seven counties along the western edge of the landform region from north to south. The 12 SLAs are non-contiguous clusters of exemplary geologic, topographic, and scenic features that best characterize the Loess Hills landform. These landscapes also contain significant amounts of remnant prairie communities, rare plants and animals, (Appendix D) and important archaeological sites. Approximately 17,000-acres (17 percent) of the land within the SLAs already has some form of existing protection: they are owned by state or county governments or by The Nature Conservancy. The remaining 82,000 acres (83 percent) are in private ownership. The Loess Hills National Natural Landmark (NNL) sites (Turin and Little Sioux) are included in the SLAs. Ownership of NNL lands is a combination of private and public ownership.

As in Alternative 3, a management entity identified in the legislation that establishes the Reserve would provide management and oversight to the Reserve. The level of federal involvement also could be specified as part of the authorizing legislation, and could include some combination of National Park Service (NPS) planning leadership and/or resource assessment. The NPS could provide assistance in developing educational programming in accordance with existing NPS standards, and could assist in defining standards for resource

protection and visitor services in the Reserve. The Loess Hills National Scenic Byway could evolve as the "thread" that winds its way through the region, tying the Reserve together. The remainder of the landform region would be protected through the efforts of individual local government units (LGUs) as described in Alternative 1.

Alternative 5: Joint Powers Board With National Reserve Option

Under this three-phased alternative, Congress could pass legislation for the Loess Hills that encourages the state of Iowa or the Counties to form a Joint Powers Board (JPB) to develop a Comprehensive Plan within a specified period. At a minimum, the JPB would consist of a quorum of at least four of the seven counties of the Loess Hills landform region. The board would be structured in a manner that provides for participation of interested municipalities, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the National Park Service, and interested tribes (Ioways, Otoe-Missouria, Winnebago, and others) as non-voting, technical advisors. Such legislation would authorize and provide funding for the National Park Service to participate as a partner in the development of a Comprehensive Plan to ensure long-term protection of the Hills.

The legislation also would outline a mechanism whereby the JPB and the Governor of Iowa could petition the Secretary of Interior to designate the National Reserve, as authorized in the Loess Hills legislation.

The JPB would initiate the development of a Comprehensive Plan for the Loess Hills. The National Park Service would be authorized and funded to provide technical assistance to the JPB in the development of the Comprehensive Plan and associated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS would evaluate impacts of alternatives for protection of the Hills as described, including, at the board's discretion, an alternative focused on creation of a National Reserve.

If a National Reserve alternative were considered, the National Park Service would review the Comprehensive Plan to ensure that the measures for protecting the resources and for providing for visitor enjoyment are consistent with NPS policies. The Governor of Iowa would request the Secretary of the Interior approve designation of the Loess Hills National Reserve and sanction the management entity recommended in the plan. Upon approval of the Secretary, the National Reserve would become an affiliated area of the National Park System. The Reserve would be managed by the sanctioned management entity. There would not be federal land acquisition within the Loess Hills National Reserve.

A comparison of the five action alternatives is provided in Table 8.

Table 8: Comparison of Management Alternatives:

	Federal Designation	Land Acquisition	Management and Land Use Decisions	Level of NPS Involvement	Interpretation and Education	Development and Operating Costs
Alternative #1 Local Government Unit (LGU) (No Federal Action Alternative)	None.	No federal acquisition of lands	Local. Individual counties could develop a Comprehensive Plan. The plan may or may not be coordinated with other counties.	Upon request, technical assistance, subject to staff availability (as is present level).	Existing local programs would continue.	Local funding.
Alternative #2 Joint Powers Board (JPB)	None.	No federal acquisition of lands.	Regional. A JPB would develop a Comprehensive Plan for the landform region.	Upon request, technical assistance, subject to staff availability.	Provided by JPB and coordinated with existing efforts.	JPB funded from existing county funds, State appropriations, and/or new revenue generated through authorities available to JPB.
Alternative #3 Entire Landform a National Reserve	National Reserve (NPS Affiliated Area).	No federal acquisition of lands.	Regional. A management entity would develop a Comprehensive Plan.	NPS technical assistance for planning efforts.	Provided by management entity and coordinated with existing efforts. *NPS technical assistance.	Management entity provides funding.
Alternative #4 12 Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) a National Reserve	**National Reserve (NPS Affiliated Area).	No federal acquisition of lands.	Regional and local. A management entity would develop a Comprehensive Plan for the SLAs. Local efforts would continue, as in Option 1 for the remaining landform.	NPS technical assistance for planning efforts.	Provided by management entity and coordinated with existing efforts. *NPS technical assistance.	Management entity provides funds.
Alternative 5 JPB; National Reserve Option (Recommended and Preferred Alternative)	Potential for National Reserve upon request of JPB and Governor.	No federal acquisition of lands.	Regional. A JPB would develop a Comprehensive Plan for the participating counties.	Same as #2. If National Reserve then NPS technical assistance in planning efforts.	Provided by JPB; Coordinated with existing efforts. *NPS technical assistance if designated a National Reserve.	If designated a Reserve, JPB provides funding.

*Technical assistance contingent upon available staff/funding.

** Upon completion of evaluation, eligible SLAs would be designated as a National Reserve

